

**FABIANISM: ITS DEVELOPMENT AND DECLINE AS AN
ORGANIZED SOCIALIST MOVEMENT IN GREAT BRITAIN
FROM 1883-1906**

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	11
CHAPTER I. SOCIAL REFORM WRITERS AND MOVEMENTS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY WHOSE VIEWS INFLUENCED FABIAN POLICIES	1
CHAPTER II. ORGANIZATION OF FABIAN SOCIETY	11
CHAPTER III. FABIAN SOCIETY'S POLICIES IN THE AREA OF ECONOMICS, EDUCATION, POLITICS, IMPERIALISM, AND THE LABOUR QUESTION	28
CHAPTER IV. THE DECLINE OF FABIANISM	51
CONCLUSION 	63
BIBLIOGRAPHY	67

INTRODUCTION

For centuries there have been individuals who have proposed plans for creating a society in which all people would share equally the earth's wealth. These individuals believed that this was the only way that all men would eventually achieve a sense of true and complete happiness in a world based on the democratic processes.

Of the various ways suggested to achieve this kind of society in which wealth would be equally shared, socialism in various forms has become the dominant thought of many men. According to Floyd Melvin in his work entitled Socialism and the Sociological Ideal, a society under the rule of socialism would have much of its anti-social modes of conduct eliminated. Eventually an altruistic spirit would be acquired by man who would not have the egoistic features of economic competition forever assailing him.¹ J. Ramsey MacDonald, a Fabian socialist and British prime minister in the early twentieth century, describes socialism as "the creed of those who recognize that the community exists for the individual and for the maintenance of liberty." He further states that "the control of the economic circumstances of life means the control of life itself."²

Socialism seeks to build up a social organization which will

¹Floyd Melvin, Socialism and the Sociological Ideal (New York: Sturgis and Walton Co., 1915), p. 67.

²J. Ramsey MacDonald, Socialism, Critical and Constructive (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1924), p. 42.

include in its activities the management of those economic instruments such as land and industrial capital that cannot be left safely in the hands of individuals who parlay gains into enormous wealth of their own while the majority of the population enjoy very few of the immense riches of the earth. Socialism then is an application of mutual aid to economics and politics. Its end is liberty for all through a change in social mechanism; it deals primarily with evolution of economic relationship and not with the moral nature of man.

There have been many socialistic movements for reform in different countries of the world beginning in Biblical times with the writings of the Prophets Amos and Hosea. Each social movement or social writer in Great Britain desired to change the political, social, or economic relations, not primarily for the advantages of the participants but for the benefits of all people. These movements were diverse in origin and inspired by many symbolic ideals. When first formulated some movements seemed of no significance to those who seemed contented with the status quo. However, with the growth of democracy in Great Britain after 1850, there appeared several movements that combined ideas of previous movements with new ideas and made an appeal to the masses to participate more fully in the making of governmental policies. By the last half of the nineteenth century, the scientific socialist movement, advanced by the teachings of Karl Marx was the most acceptable to social reformers. While most of them agreed with the Marxist theory of economics, they rejected his views on philosophy and religion. From this group there came a movement based on the views of the so-called ethical socialists; they regarded a collectivistic economy as being a more desirable means of distributing goods and services. They usually

placed more emphasis upon moderate reforms.

Closely resembling the ethical socialists were the Christian writers and preachers who attacked capitalism as immoral and materialistic. Christian Socialists sought a return to an earlier form of economic life which had been obliterated by modern industrialism.

Fabianism, a form of socialism which developed in the last decades of the nineteenth century embodied the thinking of older and contemporary socialist movements. It regarded capitalism as undesirable and the more traditional forms of socialism being spread as alien to the true spirit of the nation or state. Through lectures and research, Fabian thinkers attempted to acquaint the middle class with the existing evils of society, offering at the same time methods for changing the laws. Fabians were interested in educating all persons to share effectively in the wealth and political life of the nation.

In order to fully understand the development of Fabianism as a socialist movement, this thesis will give a brief analysis of the abstract doctrines and principles advanced by some social movements and writers in Great Britain. It will show how their approach to the formation of the ideal society was incorporated into the principles of the Fabians or rejected by them in their movement to rectify the evils of industrial capitalism. A description of the origin and policies of Fabianism will help us to see a different approach to socialism; to understand how Fabianism profited by the mistakes of its forerunners and was able to permeate its ideas for gradual socialism into the political and economic life of Britain.

Fabianism did not spread widely or rapidly and its period of strength as an organized movement was short; nevertheless, this move-

ment was able to influence the working classes into forming a Labour Party. Through this organ, the Fabians were able to realise to some extent their ideals for a society which practiced human freedom, economic, and political equality.

CHAPTER I

SOCIAL REFORM WRITERS AND MOVEMENTS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY WHOSE VIEWS INFLUENCED FABIAN POLICIES

Of the many societies for social reform which came into existence in the years from 1870 to 1890, none exercised so marked an influence on public opinion and legislation in Great Britain as that of the Fabian Society.¹ This society was the outgrowth of a group of persons who met regularly in the early 1880's to study the works of earlier philosophers. Like other unorganized socialist groups, there were some enthusiastic young members and a few of the older ones who placed their hopes on a sudden tumultuous uprising of a united proletariat. To these individuals the capitalists would then go down like "nine pins" leaving society to quietly resolve itself into a utopia. However, most of them were against advocating a catastrophe of this nature. They believed that no sudden or simultaneous transformation of society from an individualistic to a collectivistic basis was possible. In short, these persons were interested in formulating a plan that would disprove the theory that socialism was bound up with insurrection on one hand and utopianism on the other.² They set to work to discover for themselves

¹Max Beer, A History of British Socialism (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1929), Vol. II., p. 274.

²Mary A. Hamilton, Sidney and Beatrice Webb (London: Sampson, Low, Marston and Co., 1933), p. 28.

and to teach others how practically to transform England into a commonwealth of social democracy. The majority of the society had read and were acquainted with the works of some of the writers for social reforms and were also aware of socialist movements in Great Britain. They resolved to examine even closer the views and policies of these writers and organizations to form their own conclusions as to what method to contemplate for a realization of a democracy based on social reforms.

Of the numerous early nineteenth century social reform writers, this young ethical group (the later Fabians) learned that none was more self-sacrificing than Robert Owen, (1771-1858), who has become known as the "father of British socialism". Owen proposed that productive forces be placed in the hands of the whole society. He also suggested that workers should establish a labor bureau and he inspired the founding of a community in New Harmony, Indiana (United States of America) for the purpose of communal living.³ Owen's program for communal living failed but in 1821 at his urging the London Co-operative Society was formed. This organization sought to establish a village of unity and mutual cooperation. Owen was also the leader of the first national trade union movement, The Grand National Consolidated Trades of Great Britain, organized in 1834. This organization lasted for less than a year, but during its brief life it frightened many people of wealth and power.⁴

Owen's views and efforts at social reforms were acceptable to most of the Fabians and other socialist groups because they did not attempt

³Henry W. Laidler, A History of Socialist Thought (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1927), pp. 121-122.

⁴Beer, op. cit., p. 243.

to turn to the past for inspiration, but tried to put the existing productive and distributive forces into the hands of the laborers who were most responsible for its outcome. Owen taught the people a kind of socialism that was essentially cooperative. To him this was the most logical way of achieving the justifiable social changes they as workers deserved.

Another reform writer who greatly impressed the Fabians was Henry George. In 1879, George published his work, Progress and Poverty. Among the several opinions stated in his book, he stated that nowhere in the civilized world did labor receive its just wages. In order to remedy for this situation George advocated a tremendous revolution in the political life of society which would guarantee to the masses suffrage and economic security.⁵ His work stimulated many individuals to turn their attention to economics. From him the Fabians learned to associate the new gospel as taught by him with the old methods of earlier writers and movements as a means of achieving social justice.⁶

When the Fabians began their study of ethics, more than thirty years had passed since another nineteenth century, social reformer had published several works dealing with the ever present problems of equal justice for all. John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) maintained in his books Religion of Humanity, Positive Polity, and Political Economy that man was compelled to see himself as part of a social group. He thought that society could be greatly improved by changes in the educational system and the political life of Britain. Through these changes man would then

⁵Ibid.

⁶Edward R. Pease, The History of the Fabian Society (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1918), p. 19.

be able to participate more fully in the making of policies that governed his life, thereby obtaining the ultimate sanction for the greatest happiness. Mill groped for a theory of social reform by "law and rent" in his quest for happiness for the greatest number. He depicted the evils of private property under capitalism. His approach to the teachings of socialism and communism suggested that there was a system alternate to these which was worthy of investigation.

The ideas of the British philosopher Jeremy Bentham, (1748-1832) touched large areas of English thought. Reformers who believed in Benthamism demanded changes in the representative system, in the economic and political policy of the government, in the criminal laws, and in legal procedure. Bentham declared that every individual acted in a way he thought would give him the most pleasure, and the supreme purpose of the government was to see to it that all institutions, laws, and customs were useful to men living in a society so that they would be as happy as possible. Bentham's philosophy was that when laws were not useful to men they should be reformed or discarded and new ones passed that would be beneficial to the greatest number. In theory, Bentham's efforts were directed against the landed oligarchy and were in favour of a democracy. His formula was, "the greatest happiness for the greatest number." Bentham thought happiness would be acquired through plentiful production of commodities and an equitable distribution of the same. The Fabians agreed with most of the principles advocated by Bentham in his published work, Catechism of Parliamentary Reform. However, the Fabian society believed that equality could only be imposed by collective control and ownership by the State of the production and distribution of goods. The Fabians' formula bore resemblance to that

of Bentham. It called for "the greatest efficiency of the greatest number." Like Bentham, the Fabians believed that when the wealth was distributed equally, then other social problems would be minimized in the quest for happiness.

Karl Marx (1818-1883) was perhaps the most influential revolutionary writer of the nineteenth century. In 1848 Marx collaborated with Frederick Engels (1820-1895) and the two published The Communist Manifesto.

The Fabians agreed with the principles of Marx and Engels that the rise of capital and industry tended to make the ruling class powerful and to exploit the workers. They accepted the notion that the "workers of the world" should unite but not in the revolutionary way suggested by Marx. Instead the Fabians taught the workers to use the tactics of research and political involvement to nationalize the forces of production and distribution to obtain their equitable share of the wealth. Most Fabians had read Marx's Critique of Political Economy which stated that the introduction of machinery by the capitalists set the labourers partly free resulting in a surplus working population. This compelled the worker to submit more to the dictation of capital. All the capitalist cared for was to reduce the laborer's individual consumption as far as possible to what was strictly necessary. Capitalist production reproduced the separation between labor power and the means of labor. Capitalism reproduced and perpetuated the conditions for exploiting the laborer; thereby forcing the laborer to sell his labor power in order to live and enable the capitalist to purchase labor power in order to enrich himself. When laborers learned to organize themselves to weaken the ruinous effects of the natural law of

capitalistic production, then capital would cease controlling the forces of production and distribution. Members of the Fabian Society accepted Marx's views that the capitalist system forced laborers to accept a state resembling that of servitude.⁷ However, the Fabians chose to ignore the dynamic part of Marx's socialist economics in his "law of movement of capitalism," his theory of the trade cycle.⁸ It is possible that the Fabians may have discussed Marx's analysis of the causes of cyclical fluctuation in capitalist economy at the meetings of the Hampstead Historic Circle, but there is no recorded report of such. One reason suggested as to why Fabians did not elaborate on Marx's attempts to give a causal analysis of cyclical fluctuation was due mostly to the fact that Marx was a revolutionist and a "Hegelian." Therefore, as a Hegelian, Marx was concerned about showing how "inner contradictions" of capitalism would bring about its destruction. Marx, as a revolutionist, was interested in periods when revolutionary situations developed because of industrial crises.⁹ The Fabians held a different point of view. They desired a gradual and continuous development towards socialism without catastrophic change, and economic crises were to them a manifestation of the injustice and the suffering caused by capitalism.¹⁰ Fabians concerned themselves with the stabilizing effects of a counter-cycle policy, and rejected an analysis which attempted to prove that the

⁷Karl Marx, A Critique of Political Economy (Chicago: C. H. Herr and Co., 1933), pp. 68-69.

⁸A. M. McBriar, Fabian Socialism and English Politics, 1884-1918 (New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 48.

⁹Ibid., p. 49.

¹⁰Ibid.

contradictions of capitalism could not be overcome, save by complete change.

As a historian, some Fabians viewed Marx in a different way. They were impressed by some of his historical writings. The writings of Marx were unacceptable to the Webbs, however, who thought Marx was attempting to impose a transcendental pattern on historical facts; they considered his theory of history merely one hypothesis amongst many which appears to describe some of the phenomena of social evolution but not others; they apparently believed he was seeking to reduce all causes to economic ones.¹¹

All reasoning for social reform was not left to socialist writers. In the early nineteenth century, there were workers who organized themselves into a group known as the Chartists. Their efforts became known as the Chartist Movement. The term "chartism" was derived from the People's Charter presented by the Workingmen's Association in 1837 to members of Parliament. The charter contained six points, which were: (1) universal manhood suffrage; (2) annual election of parliament; (3) equal electoral districts; (4) vote by secret ballot; (5) removal of property qualifications for members of parliament; and (6) salaries for members of parliament so that poor men could afford to sit in it.¹² It is generally accepted that the Chartists had in view a true democratic society. The movement attained its greatest vigor from 1837-1842. Members of the Chartist group were divided into the moral force and the

¹¹Ibid., p. 63.

¹²Julius West, A History of the Chartist Movement (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1920), p. 77.

physical force. The moral force protagonists favored persuasion and education as a means for achieving reform. The physical force bitterly denounced the factory system, the Poor Law, and thought that reform could be attained only by violence.¹³ Fabians worked for the same causes in their movement as did members of both Chartist groups. These included abolition of property qualifications for parliamentary candidates, equal electoral districts, and an annual ballot. Moral-force Chartists were like Fabians, humble writers and workmen. Their claims were not based upon abstract ideas, but upon the need for political and economic equality to assure all men justice.

To some of those who joined the Fabian Society in its early days, Christian socialism opened the way of salvation. This movement of the late nineteenth century claimed to be the spiritual child of the Christian Socialist movement of 1848-1852. This earlier movement was socialist only on its critical side. It was merely a cooperative association of voluntary workmen among the skilled and semi-skilled laborers. The Christian Socialist movement of the latter nineteenth century was under the guidance of the Reverend Stewart D. Headlam. Under his leadership the Christian Socialists attacked the policy of land reform, particularly on the lines of Henry George's "Single Tax." They attacked capitalists as being immoral and materialistic and sought a return to the earlier form of economic life which had been obliterated by modern industrialism. Reverend Headlam later became a Fabian and contributed

¹³Phillips Taft, Movements for Economic Reform (New York: Rhinehart and Company, 1950), p. 34.

Tract No. 42 Christian Socialism. This tract was written by a churchman for Christians and while the Fabians as a whole approved the conclusions drawn by Headlam, the premises commended themselves to but a few of them.¹⁴ Fabians for the most part compromised on Christian doctrine in reference to eliminating employer-employee relationship as a step towards improving working conditions. They disagreed that it was the duty of only the church to help men supply their necessities. One might surmise at this point that Fabians were those who advocated separation of state and church in economic matters.

With the formation of the Democratic Federation in 1881, converted into the Social-Democratic Federation two years later, Marxian socialism was introduced to the English people. Its leader was Henry Mayers Hyndman (1842-1921), the author of England for All. The program of the Federation was radical but reminiscent of Chartism rather than Marxism. Like the Fabians its members worked for nationalization of the land and industry, for industry workers, housing, universal free education, a legal eight-hour day, employees, public works, for the unemployed, graduated income taxes and redemption of the national debt. The organization split in 1883 because there were those who differed over the methods used to spread the doctrine of the organization. There were also some members who opposed centralization and feared state socialism as a new form of tyranny.¹⁵ Those who succeeded founded the Socialist League on December 30, 1884. The Social Democratic League

¹⁴Pease, op. cit., p. 21.

¹⁵Taft, op. cit., p. 206.

policy continued to reflect those of the Fabian Society as its members in 1893 adopted the following program: "Labour is the source of wealth, therefore wealth belongs to labour. We believe in collective ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange managed by a democratic state." Members of the Socialist League wanted complete emancipation of labor from the domination of capital and landlord. They were convinced that all officers or administrators should be elected by universal suffrage.

The intellectual Fabians who read widely and accepted and rejected many theories and practices of earlier socialistic movements and writers, later were to assemble their ideas into an organization that was to have a marked influence on the lives of a large majority of the laboring class of Great Britain. Fabianism was to become the thought of the political and economic life of Great Britain in the last decade of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 207.

CHAPTER II

ORGANIZATION OF FABIAN SOCIETY

Thomas Davidson (1840-1900) has been given credit for being the person who most influenced the organizing of the Fabian Society. In the autumn of 1883, Davidson made a short visit to London and held several meetings with those persons interested in social reform. He expounded his ideas of a Vita Nuova, a "Fellowship of the New Life." His "New Life" was based on the principles of Rosmini, a Vatican reformer, who urged persons to live a strenuous life communistically, but on a natural religious basis.¹ Davidson had established a fellowship in the United States and an Educational Alliance in Lower East Side New York. From his talks to the discussion club, he gained a small group of adherents and to them he submitted a plan for forming the Fellowship of the New Life.²

Percival Chubb, a young clerk in the local government and later a lecturer and head of an Ethical Church in New York and St. Louis, took the initiative in formulating plans for the organization of the New Life in London. At his request a general meeting of interested persons was

¹Pease, op. cit., p. 30.

²Ibid., p. 31.

held at Edward R. Pease's home on October 24, 1883. Those present included both women and men. Among them were Havelock Ellis, R. B. P. Frost, Hamilton Pullen, Miss Isabella Ford and H. H. Champion. The proceedings of the meeting were begun by a reading of Mr. Davidson's paper on the "New Life."³ Following the reading, a general discussion was held. The idea of founding a community as proposed was discredited by most of the persons present. They recognized that it would be impossible to establish such an independent community in England. It was agreed by some present that what could be done perhaps would be for a number of persons in sympathy with the idea to unite for the purpose of common living. These individuals could live as far as possible a communistic life. They would realize among themselves a higher life, making their primary aim to provide a worthy education for the young. These persons who were to make up such a community were to continue their present callings in the world, but they were to try to make their community as far as practicable self-contained and self-supporting. It was suggested that the members combine perhaps to carry on some business or businesses. Since no definite conclusions were reached, it was arranged to discuss the matter further at a meeting scheduled for November 7, 1884.⁴

At this second meeting, a number of new persons attended including Herbert Bland who later wrote the Fabian Essay entitled The Outlook. It was he who proposed that resolutions and objects be passed and

³Ibid., pp. 32-33.

⁴Ibid., p. 33.

organize the group into a society. After a general discussion the following resolution was proposed and agreed to:

That an association be formed whose ultimate aim shall be the reconstruction of Society in accordance with the highest moral possibilities.⁵

A committee was then appointed to draw up and submit proposals for a new society. It was resolved that the group would in the future meet on Fridays, a practice the Society held for more than thirty years.

The appointed committee presented its proposals at the November 23, 1884 meeting, including the following resolution which passed unanimously:

The members of the Society assert that the competitive system assures the happiness and comfort of the few at the expense of the suffering of the many and that Society must be reconstituted in such a manner as to secure the general welfare and happiness.⁶

At the next meeting held December 7, 1883, Dr. Burns - Gibson introduced a definite plan for the organization of a New Life Fellowship.

Object - The cultivation of a perfect character in each and all.

Principle - The subordination of material things to spiritual.

Fellowship - The sole and essential condition of fellowship shall be single-minded sincere and strenuous devotion to the object and principle.⁷

Further articles of the plan touched on the formation of a

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., p. 32.

⁷Ibid., p. 33.

community, the supplanting of the spirit of competition, the highest education of the young, simplicity of living, the importance of manual labor, and religious communion. It was agreed by those present that the Fellowship would be formed by all these bases.⁸

However, there were those among the group who were convinced that a New Life organization would not be beneficial to the majority of society. On January 4, 1884 these persons - Mrs. Robins, Miss Robins, Miss Haddon, Messrs. J. Hunter, Watts, Bland, Kedell, Pease, Stapleton, Chubb, Burns-Gibson, Swann, Podmore and Estcourt met at Pease's home. Following a general discussion it was agreed to form a society whose objectives would be to:⁹

Hold meetings for discussions, the reading of papers, hearing of reports, etc.

Delegate some of its members to attend meetings held on social subjects, debates at Workmen's Clubs, etc., in order that such members may in the first place report to the Society on proceedings, in the second place put forward as the occasion serves, the views of the Society.

Take measures in other ways as for example by the collection of articles from current literature to obtain information on all contemporary social movements and social needs.¹⁰

At the suggestion of Frank Podmore, the society was named the Fabian Society in allusion to the victorious policy of Fabius Cunctator. Fabius was a Roman general and dictator who lived in the third century

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁰Ibid.

B. C. In his lifetime, Fabius was nicknamed the Delayer because of his delaying tactics against Hannibal in the second Punic War. He avoided pitched battles at a time when Rome was weak, thereby winning time for the Republic to build up its strength.¹¹

The mottoes presumably based on Fabius' philosophy read:

For the right moment you must wait as Fabius did most patiently when warring against Hannibal though many censored his delays; but when the time comes you must strike hard as Fabius did or your waiting will be in vain and fruitless.

Wherefore it may not be gain said that the fruit of this man's long thinking of counsel - and (by the many so deemed) untimely delay was the safeholding for all men, his fellow citizens of the common Weal.¹²

Though Fabius eventually met and defeated Hannibal at the Battle of Tarantium, he was not the vanquisher of Hannibal. He died before Hannibal was vanquished and Carthage destroyed by Roman Scipio Africanus. Edward Pease, admits the error of the members in basing their mottoes on Fabius. These mottoes were usually accompanied by a sketch of an angry tortoise drawn by Fabian artist Walter Crane. The tortoise was symbolic of persistence, longevity, slow and guarded progress towards a revolutionary goal.¹³

On September 5, 1884, George Bernard Shaw, a freelance journalist living on a stipend, joined the Fabian Society. Shaw who became one of the most dedicated members of the society wrote Tract No. 2 on September

¹¹Rose L. Martin, Fabian Freeway (Chicago: Heritage Foundation, 1966), p. 13.

¹²Pease, op. cit., p. 39.

¹³Ibid.

19, 1884 which first listed the purpose and beliefs of the Fabians.

The tract was entitled A Manifesto. The statement of belief reads thusly:

The Fabians are associated for spreading the following opinions held by them and discussing their practical consequences.

That under existing circumstances wealth cannot be enjoyed without dishonor or foregone without misery.

That it is the duty of each member of the State to provide for his or her wants by her or his own Labour.

That a life interest in the Land and Capitol of the nation is the birthright of every individual born within its confines and that access to this birthright should not depend upon the will of any private person other than the person seeking it.

That the most striking result of our present system of forming out the national Land and Capitol to private persons has been the division of Society into hostile classes, with large appetites and no dinners at one extreme and large dinners and no appetites at the other.

That the practice of entrusting the Land of the nation to private persons in the hope that they will make the best of it has been discredited by the consistency with which they have made the worst of it; and that Nationalization of the Land in some form is a public duty.

That the pretensions of Capitalism to encourage Invention and to distribute its benefits in the fairest way attainable have been discredited by the experiences of the nineteenth century.

That, under the existing system of leaving the National Industry to organize itself, competition has the effect of rendering adulteration, dishonest dealing and inhumanity compulsory.

That since Competition amongst producers admittedly secures to the public the most satisfactory products, the State should compete with all its might in every department of production.

That such restraints upon Free Competition as the penalties for infringing the Postal monopoly and the withdrawal of work-house and prison labour from the markets, should be abolished.

That no branch of Industry should be carried on at a profit by the central administration.

That the Public Revenue should be levied by a direct Tax; and that the central administration should have no legal power to hold back for the replenishment of the Public Treasury any portion of the proceeds of Industries administered by them.

That the State should compete with private individuals - especially with parents - in providing happy homes for children, so that every child may have a refuge from the tyranny

or neglect of its natural custodians.

That men no longer need political privileges to protect them against women, and that the sexes should henceforth enjoy political rights.

That no individual should enjoy any Privilege in consideration of services rendered to the State by his or her parents or other relations.

That the State should secure a liberal education and an equal share in the National Industry to each of its units.

That the established Government has no more right to call itself the State than the smoke of London has to call itself the weather.

That we had rather face a Civil War than such another century of suffering as the present one has been.

A document called The Basis, adopted by the Society June 3, 1887, explained more explicitly the purpose of the Society than did the Manifesto. It was a test of admission, a minimum basis of agreement, an acceptance required from those who aspired to share in the control of the Society. Edward R. Pease, Fabian secretary for many years, stated that the Basis was purely economic and unnecessarily rigid since it based the Society's goal mainly on the construction of society along economic lines rather than social reforms in all areas of human existence. The Basis contained the following aims:

"The Fabian Society consists of socialists."

It therefore aimed at the reorganization of Society by the emancipation of land and industrial capital from individual and class ownership, and the vesting of them in the community for the general benefit. In this way only could the natural and acquired advantages of the country be equitably shared by the whole people.

"The Society accordingly works for the extinction of private property in land and the consequent individual appropriation in the form of rent, of the price paid for permission to use the earth as well as for the advantage of superior soil and sites."

The Society, further, was to work for the transfer to the community of the administration of such industrial capital as can be conveniently be managed socially, for, owing to the monopoly of the means of production in the past, industrial inventions and the transformation of surplus income into capital have mainly enriched the proprietary class, the worker being now dependent on that class for leave to earn a living.

If these measures were to be carried out, without compensation (though not without such relief to expropriated individual as may seem to fit the community), rent and interest would be added to the reward of labor, the idle class living on the labors of others would necessarily disappear, and practical equality of opportunity would be maintained by the spontaneous action of economic forces with much less interference with personal liberty than the existing system entailed.

For the attainment of these ends, the Fabian Society looked to the spread of socialist opinions, and the social and political changes consequent thereon, including the establishment of equal citizenship for men and women. It seeks to achieve these ends by the general dissemination of knowledge as to the relation between the individual and society in its economic, ethical, and political aspects.¹⁴

For months after its formal organization, the Fabian Society remained a pure discussion group. The Industrial Remuneration Conference held January 28, 1885 was the first occasion that the Society emerged from its drawing room obscurity and made its views and policies known

¹⁴Laidler, op. cit., p. 235.

public. The conference, sponsored by a Mr. Miller of Edinburgh and which included representatives from all socialist groups and trade unions, met for three days. The first day was devoted to discussing the question, "Has the increase of products of industry within the last hundred years tended most to the benefit of the capitalists and employers or to that of the working classes whether artisans, laborers or others?" The second day was devoted to "Remedies," and the third day devoted to the question, "Would the more general distribution of capital or land promote or impair the production of wealth and the welfare of the community?" On the third day George B. Shaw, one of the two Fabian delegates, delivered a speech which made a favorable impression on the other delegates. He stated "that what the socialist aimed at was the substitution for the Dictatorship of the Capitalist with a government of the people, by the people." He stated further the socialists would seek the municipalization of all industries and services by which people live. Shaw said that this way was the only way in which the whole body of people could participate in the administration of their own affairs. He commented that the main purpose of socialism was twofold: to apply democracy to industry and to adopt the principle of maximising equality in life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.¹⁵

As a society the Fabians welcomed the adherence of men and women of every religious denomination or of no religious affiliation. The Society insisted that socialism was secular in nature because its objects

¹⁵George Bernard Shaw, Fabian Essays, Jubilee Edition (London: Allen and Unwin, 1948), p. 59.

and purposes in advocating collective action for all was a means of developing the soul, conscience and character as to the righteousness of human existence.¹⁶ Any person desiring membership in the Society had to secure a proposer and seconder among the members of the Society. These persons had to vouch for the persons desiring membership as being one who was interested in carrying out the work of the Society. A person desiring membership was then asked to attend two meetings as a visitor. If he or she was accepted as a member, they were required to sign The Basis and do some personal work for the Society as evidence of faith and zeal.

The London Fabian Society did not urge the formation of branches of lukewarm adherents, but by April, 1891, local Fabian Societies had been formed at Belfast, Birmingham, Bristol, Huddersfield, Hyde, Leeds, Manchester, Oldham, Plymouth, Tyneside, and Wolverhampton. The Society also maintained a scattering of official teachers in India, Africa, China and South America. The parent London Society retained complete control over the affairs of all societies. A mass meeting of all members was held once a year and at that time the Executive was elected for a year. It was the duty of the Executive to review articles and tracts written for publication, and to notify the members of any changes in policy through the Fabian Newsletter.¹⁷ No fees were required of any members. The Parent Society sent literature to the local societies and published any news the local societies reported. The main reason

¹⁶Pease, op. cit., p. 57.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 191.

the Parent Society supported the local societies of Fabian type was to gather data to present to liberal members of Parliament, and to secure individuals with socialist inclination, willing to run for offices in local governments.¹⁸

The summer of 1905 was the low-water mark of provincial Fabianism. The British Labour Party had absorbed many of the former members. In a report to the Parent Society only nine societies were named and four of these had just a nominal existence. The Oxford University Society had six members; Glasgow had thirty in its University Society and fifty in its town Society; Liverpool had sixty-three; and Leeds and County fifteen members. According to Pease, Executive Fabian Secretary, the local Fabian Societies did nothing towards the making of a middle class Socialist Party, nor did they achieve much else. He stated that their only justification were able to instruct and disseminate ideas to others interested in being politically intelligent. Pease further stated that only two local society members contributed tracts.¹⁹ These were written by Sidney Bell and Sir Oliver Lodge. All the other tracts were written by members of the London Society.

From its formation, the Fabian Society believed its mission to lie more in dissemination of ideas than in practical organization. It tried to think out proposals for the reformation of particular political, social, and economic evils along broad socialist lines. To achieve these reforms it sought to enlist the support of persons who were in key positions for helping to carry out their schemes or who had

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid.

their "ears stopped" by vested interest to appeal to reason. The Society tried to make the plain, ordinary person who was intelligent, care about establishing a socialist government as the best means of achieving social reforms for society as a whole. The person the Fabian wished to convert was the man or woman who was in the best position for influencing others, either over a wide area or his own comparatively narrow group. Such persons may have been civil servants, professional men or women, trade or cooperative leaders.²⁰

One method the Fabians used to influence others was through lecturers. Lectures were given mostly in liberal and radical clubs, others were arranged by cooperative societies and branches of the Social Democratic Federation and Socialist League and some in towns and cities in open air areas. The first important group of lecturers were those of the "Lancashire Campaign." It was thoroughly organized. An advanced agent was sent down and abstracts of lectures were prepared and printed to facilitate accurate reports in the press. Complete lists of the forthcoming lectures, dates, places, subjects and lecturers were printed. Some of the lecturers were George Bernard Shaw, Annie Besant, Herbert Bland, Robert E. Dell, Reverend Stewart Headlam and Sidney Webb. The campaign began on September 20, 1890 and ended October 27, 1890 when about sixty lectures had been delivered not only in Lancashire, at Manchester, Liverpool, Rochdale, Oldham, Preston Salford, and the district round Manchester, but also at Barnsley, Kendal, Carlisle, Sheffield and Hebden Bridge. The lectures given in sets of four

²⁰George D. H. Cole, Fabian Socialism (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1943), p. 3.

in consecutive weeks were on the subjects of "Socialism;" "Where Liberalism Fails;" "Cooperation and Labour;" "The Future of Women;" "The Eight Hours Bill;" and "Politics and Labour." Also during 1890 lectures were given by Dr. Bernard Bosanquet on "Antithesis Between Individualism and Socialism Philosophically Considered." Mrs. Annie Besant delivered a lecture on "Socialism and the School Board Policy;" Sir Llewellyn Smith lectured on the "Causes and Effects of Immigration from Country to Town," in which he disproved the then universal opinion that the unemployed of East London were immigrants from rural districts. George B. Shaw gave the lecture "Ibsen" and it is regarded by some as the high-water mark in Fabian lectures. This lecture pointed out all the fallacies existing in governmental policies in its dealings with the welfare of the masses, especially the working classes.

In the year 1891, only two lectures by members were recorded. However, with the establishment of the London School of Economics in 1894, Fabians were able to give educational lectures on social and political subjects such as socialism, trade unionism, cooperation, Poor Law, economics and economic history. The method using lectures as method of permeating society with its ideas was used by Fabians to a great degree until the last of the nineteenth century. Lecturers were selected with care, and were in some cases given a maintenance allowance during the preparation of their lectures. Four lectures on the university extension lines were delivered in about fifty towns during the year 1896-1897. Half of them were under the auspices of branches of the Independent Labour Party and the rest organized by liberal associations and other bodies. These lectures were designed to be

educational and the lecturers were J. Ramsey MacDonald, Miss Enid Stacy, J. Bruce Glasier and S. D. Shallard. The Fabians considered their lectures highly successful in changing public opinion towards socialism which was regarded by the middle class to be destructive, ill-tempered and ungenerous.²¹

The Fabian Tracts were another method used by the members of the Society to permeate its ideas and point out the evils of the Society. The first Tract was contributed by W. L. Phillips, a house painter and worker in the Abolitionist Movement in America. The title of the tract was 'Why Are the Many Poor.' It was a sneering criticism of Christianity.²² It showed a sense of remedy. The tract was the first of a long series of tracts that aimed at supplying information and carrying out the original object of the Society, the education of its members and the systematic study of the reconstruction of the social system. The tracts were published in the form of pamphlets about twenty-four pages long and cost one penny. The tracts covered all subjects of social reforms for government, industry, housing, and working conditions. The most widely read tracts were Facts for Socialist by Sidney Webb; The True Radical Programme, Facts for Londoners, The Eight Hours Bill. From 1890 to 1893, the Society published more than thirty tracts and distributed 986,941 copies. During this period the Society had a virtual monopoly on the production of political pamphlets in which it marshalled support of reform in the direction of socialism. Many of

²¹Ibid., p. 97.

²²Ibid., p. 12.

the tracts were prepared by committees which held numerous meetings to discuss issues. Each tract before publication was approved at a meeting by members where the author or authors of the tract had to consider every criticism and justify, amend or delete a challenged passage. Between the years 1894 and 1903, sixty-seven tracts were written and distributed to millions of persons. These tracts were instrumental in educating the intellectual person as to some of the injustices of society.

The Fabian Essays, published in 1889, formed the groundwork of Fabianism. These essays were calculated to influence the educated who had some knowledge of economics. The essays were the work of seven writers associated together to form the Executive Committee of the Society. Bernard Shaw was the editor along with Sidney Webb, and he contributed two of the essays himself, corrected and scrutinized the others with the help of Sidney Webb. Webb, who contributed the essay on Historic had a photographic memory, a gift for assembling statistical data, and a taste for political manipulation. Graham Wallas, who wrote the essay entitled Property Under Socialism was a devoted disciple of the philosopher, Jeremy Bentham. G. H. Cole, a historian, said "that Wallas' greatest importance to the Fabians was that he was both a collectivist as well as a libertarian."²³ William Clark, who edited the essay on Industrialism, was an admirable lecturer and an efficient journalist with the London Daily Chronicle. Annie Besant who was

²³ Anne Freemantle, This Little Band of Prophets, The British Fabians (New York: The New American Library, 1957), pp. 46-47.

an expositor on social injustices contributed the essay on Industry Under Socialism. Sydney Olivier wrote the essay on Morals. He came into the Fabian Society from the Positivist philosophy of Auguste Comte who believed only science was true. Hubert Bland, the author of the essay Outlook, was something of a critic and a Tory by instinct. Each of the essays was approved by all the members of the Society before they were published.²⁴

The Fabian Essays presented the case for socialism in plain language most intelligent persons understood. It based socialism on the evolution of society as it existed. The Fabian Essays did not cover all the doctrines of Fabianism but they proved, according to the Fabians, that socialism was the next step in the development of a society rendered inevitable by the changes which followed the industrial revolution. The doctrine expressed in the essays explained that all men and women have an equal right to live their lives in a manner that seems to them morally good.²⁵ Thousands of copies were purchased by readers in Great Britain and other countries including the United States. The essays showed a way for society to obtain social justices particularly in the field of economics.

Two other methods used for spreading Fabian propaganda were the book boxes and The Fabian News. The book boxes contained 5,000 volumes of books on subjects dealing with socialism, economics, history and social problems. These books were made available to local societies,

²⁴George D. H. Cole, Fabian Socialism, p. 48.

²⁵Shaw, Fabian Essays, Jubilee Edition, p. 214.

working class organizations, and to any organization of readers or students for ten shillings a year. The books were intended to be educational and each book box was made up to suit the interest of the subscriber. The Fabian News, the official organ of the Society, first appeared in March, 1891. It was published monthly and replaced by the printed circulars previously issued to the members. It was a means of communicating to the members as to the work of the Society. The Fabian News was edited by the Secretary of the Society, but everything ⁱⁿ it was subject to the express authority of the Executive Committee. Minutes of meetings and annual reports were also included in the News.

Through its organs of propaganda the Fabians tried to permeate all classes with a common opinion in favor of state control over all the resources of the land. The members of the Society used all sources available to change existing policies towards their goal of a democratic state for the English people. They were convinced that so long as the capitalist system existed poverty would prevail and only through the nationalization of gas, water, industries and the other products used by all men would there be any equality in the distribution of the wealth of the earth. In the succeeding chapter we will discuss how Fabianism helped to change policies in the fields of economics, education, politics, imperialism, and labor, thereby creating a climate for the acceptance of socialistic ideas.

CHAPTER III

FABIAN SOCIETY'S POLICIES IN THE AREAS OF ECONOMICS, EDUCATION, POLITICS, IMPERIALISM, AND THE LABOUR QUESTION

During the first five years of the Fabian Society its members were more concerned with the problem of economic than any other social problem. Through lectures by various members, the essays and tracts published periodically by the Society, Fabians attempted to point out the evils wrought by the capitalist system. In capitalism Fabians saw a system which exploited laborers, offering them a bare subsistence for their toiling while at the same time producing a delusive promise of endless employment. This blinded the laborer to the disastrous consequences of steady poverty for themselves and increasing wealth for the upper class. With the introduction of new machinery by the capitalist system, Fabians feared that there would be an increase in proletarian unemployment rather than employment resulting in a way of life similar to that which existed in feudalism. The only solution to the problem as seen by the Fabians was a revolution in the area of economics based on an extension of collective authority and municipalization of the products of the earth.

To obtain this revolution, the Fabians proposed the following plan: that the country be divided into clearly defined areas each with its elected authority; that the initiation of this new organization begin on the most advanced lines taking advantage of every

modern tendency towards less isolated modes of living; socialists would be the leaders in initiating municipal dealings with unemployed avenues to a higher life, not guiding utilization of pauper labor.¹ The main purpose of this organization would be to employ persons to do what they could do best. The performance of work would be the condition on whether a person would remain employed or unemployed. If a healthy person was offered work and he refused, then starvation would be the alternative. It was felt by the Fabians that when each individual felt absolutely secure of his subsistence, the anxiety as to material wants of the future would be swept away and there would be no longing for wealth.

The Fabians did not see an economic revolution being accomplished at once, but believed that for many years to come, the captains of industry would be more highly paid than the majority of the skilled and unskilled laborer in the industry, not because those persons should receive higher salaries, but because they still had the alternative of continuing the private enterprise system within municipalization. Therefore, they would be able to demand their terms. However, the Fabians believed that as the masses became educated, there would be more persons in position to demand better paying jobs such as foreman, supervisors and directors.

The members of the Society were convinced that the greatest problem of economics lay in the division of property. They asserted that

¹George Bernard Shaw, Fabian Essays in Socialism (London: W. Scott Co., 1889), p. 98.

the material things in which property rights existed could be divided roughly into means of production and consumption. After viewing long series of co-operative experiments and failures by men dissatisfied with the capitalist system, the Fabians were convinced that the talents of these men would be more useful in communal services for society as a whole.² Through cooperation from these individuals a gradual and planned economic revolution diffusing collectivism and nationalization, the Society reasoned, would take place.³ By this method of state ownership, equality of wealth would be possible.

To achieve their goals of municipalization or nationalization of the sources of the earth, Fabians sought to educate the middle class. It was the thinking of many Liberals and Labourites during this period that private initiative was the source of all human progress; that the power of the state should be used to emancipate private enterprise and to create competitive conditions where all individuals would be stimulated to put forth their best efforts. In order to change these prevailing habits of thought, the Society published authentic and impartial statistical tracts. Tract No. 8, Facts for Londoners, was the raw material of municipal socialism. It advocated the transfer from private exploiters to the state, the resources of gas and water. In 1899 and 1900, tracts were published on the need for municipalization of the milk industry, pawnshops, slaughterhouses, bakeries, fare insurance and steamboat industry. Tract No. 7, Land and Capital, was aimed at directed land nationalization whereby the state would control

²Ibid., p. 148.

³Ibid., p. 159.

interest and rent. The term "rent" was widened by George B. Shaw to include all differential unearned incomes from land, from ability, from opportunity, and from special profits.⁴ Interest included all non-differential unearned incomes. Shaw based his theories on Ricardo's law of rent which stated that there would be inequality of income and earnings so long as private ownership of the land prevailed. The Fabians also directed special attention to the unearned incomes of the idle landlords and shareholders because they were the typical features of the modern system of distribution. To pay these men for the use of the land was considered unsocialistic because it was a closed monopoly based on the landholder's desire to be idle and the proletarian's need for subsistence.

Fabians advanced the idea that the state decentralize its authority to local governments in order to exert gradual social control over unearned increments. By this method the state would be in control of production in regards to supply and demand. There would be less over-production of goods which determined prices and a prime cause of unemployment. To the Fabian this was the only way to achieve a true democratic state.

Members of the Fabian Society found the policies of the trade unions who worked for gradual conquest of better wages and better working conditions congenial with their principles. In 1888, Mrs. Annie Besant and Rev. Stewart Headlam assisted a Trade Union representative in getting adopted the first wages clause in contracts.

⁴Morris Hillquit, Socialism in Theory and Practice (New York: The Rand School Press, 1942), p. 52.

From 1889 onwards following the dock strike of that year, the Society had three or four elected local councils ready to strike a blow or lift a finger for the improvement of the conditions of publicly employed labor. Fabians discarded such phrases as the "abolition of the wage system." Its aim was the establishment of standard allowances for the maintenance of all workers of the community in its service, as an alternative to wages fixed by the competition of destitute men and women working for private employment, as well as for commercial profits.⁵ The Fabians opposed all pretensions to hamper the socialization of industry with equal wages. They recognized that wealth was social in its origin and must be social in its distribution, since the evolution of industry had made it impossible to distinguish the particular contribution that each person made to the common product or to ascertain its value.⁶

In its policies the Fabians leaned also on the theories of English logician and economist, William Stanley Jevons (1835-1882). According to Jevons, value of a commodity is determined by the utility of the last unit consumed. Therefore, it is possible by transferring units from the rich to the poor to increase the value derived from consumption. In other words, the Fabians argued that a dollar of income has more value to the poor than a similar amount to the rich, and that the total utility would be raised by transfers from the rich to the poor. On this basis, high income and inheritance taxes, redistribution of wealth and government enterprise could be justified by

⁵Beer, op. cit., pp. 285-286.

⁶Ibid., p. 289.

the increase in total utility that would ensue.⁷

Fabians regarded the case of the capitalist employer as relatively negligible and preferred to concentrate its attack on the least defensible side of the capitalist system: unearned income. Through the work of the Fabian Society the state recognized that unearned income should pay a larger proportion in income tax, that property which passes at death, necessarily to those who have not earned it should contribute a large quota to the public purse, and that unearned income on the land should in part belong to the public.⁸

In 1905 a parliamentary committee was appointed to investigate poverty and poor relief. Several important pieces of legislation followed this report. The first was the Labour Exchanges Act which established three hundred and fifty labour exchanges in eleven districts as clearing houses for information about job vacancies. This reduced the wanderings of the unemployed. The government agreed to lend traveling expenses to those seeking jobs listed as being available. Skilled technical workers found the labor exchanges of special value. The Trade Boards Act of 1909 dealt with the problem of sweat shop labor. A number of trade or minimum wage boards were established, composed of representatives of the government, employers, and workers. These boards were to fix minimum wages for specified trades. The third reform legislation of 1909 was the House and Town Planning Act which made landlords legally responsible for the condition of their property;

⁷Taft, op. cit., p. 208.

⁸Pease, op. cit., p. 80.

forbade the construction of back to back houses, provided for the demolition of condemned buildings by the municipal authorities and grants of state aid for the construction of new ones. The passage of these acts were due to the influence of Fabians in the House of Commons.⁹

Fabian economic policies are still carried on in the Labour Party whose answer to Britain's economic problem is nationalization of those basic industries which can no longer be left to the unplanned anarchy of monopoly capitalism. In 1946, the Labour government pushed through a bill for the nationalization of the Bank of England. Nationalization of the coal mines, communications, electric power, supply, inland transport and civil aviation followed. A bill to nationalize the steel industry was introduced in 1948. Under the National Insurance Act adopted in August, 1946 employer, employee, and the state make contributions and every person has insurance from the "cradle to the grave." Under the National Assistance Act relief of the needy poor is transferred from the local authorities to the national government. The government has taken over all the hospitals and has grouped them together. With the passage of these acts the Fabians' policies for a socialistic government have in part been realized.

The Fabian Society's policies permeated into the area of education. Since most of its members were educated, they expressed a growing concern about public education. Several members held important positions in shaping educational policies in the London school district. Mrs. Annie Besant and Rev. Stewart Headlam served as members of the

⁹Goldwin Smith, A History of England (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), pp. 680-682.

School Board in 1888. Sidney Webb was chairman and vice chairman of the London County Technical Education Board from its formation in 1893 until it came to an end in 1904 after the London Education Act became law. Graham Wallas was elected to the School Board in 1894 and from 1897 onwards served as chairman of the School Management Committee.

At one of its meetings in 1899 the members of the Society discussed the many problems concerning the education of the pupils of Great Britain. Following a lengthy exchange of ideas sixteen resolutions were introduced. One resolution advocated the transferring of education to the local government and the abolition of the school boards because so many children were being educated in sub-standard schools. These children were poorly equipped to meet the demands of earning a living in society. The Education Bill of 1902 was based on the proposals of the Fabians. The act abolished the local school boards. Local county and borough councils under the minister of education were to control secular education in all schools including those established by county councils under the act of 1870 and all voluntary schools founded by religious groups.¹⁰ The act contained provisions for secondary and technical education. The bill did not apply to London and in the great province ruled by its County Council the case for maintaining the separate existence of the School Board was stronger than anywhere else. Sidney Webb introduced a series of resolutions which outlined a plan for London education.¹¹ This plan was introduced in the House of Commons by Arthur J. Balfour. Eleven of the proposals

¹⁰Frederick G. Marcham, A History of England (New York: Macmillan Co., 1957), p. 592.

¹¹Ibid., p. 593.

were adopted and the act which passed only departed from the original proposals by giving the borough councils the right to appoint two thirds of the managers of the schools and by omitting of the proposal that the education authority should have compulsory power to acquire sites for schools other than elementary. The passage of the Education Bill was accomplished by the Fabians who posted thousands of documents to members of Parliament and to education authorities up and down the country. Many members of the society lectured and debated at Liberal associations and clubs untiringly worked the London and provincial newspaper presses. None of the resources of skillful propagandists were neglected which might result in the passage of the Bill.

With the transfer of the controls of all elementary schools to the local authorities the problem of feeding needy children became serious. The Fabian Society's contribution towards eliminating this hunger among those unable to provide for themselves school lunches was a tract, After Bread: Education, A Plan for the State Feeding of School Children. This tract published in 1905 advocated that the state allocate funds for free lunches. Under the Liberal Education Bill of 1906, a law providing free lunches by the state was passed by the Liberals.

The Fabians were also instrumental in establishing an educational school for those who desired study beyond that offered in the public schools. They began in 1894 a school with part of a legacy left to the Society by Henry Hutchinson. Hutchinson, a former Fabian, directed that the money be spent within ten years. Sidney Webb, William Clark, W. S. De Matoots and E. R. Pease were named trustees of this legacy. Through their combined efforts, they found the London School of Economics and Political Science because they considered it essential that

those persons concerned with social reconstruction should be thoroughly versed in the sciences of economics and politics. Furthermore, they were convinced that all classes of public officials should have the opportunity of learning whatever there was to be known on modern thinking in these areas. The trustees made no attempt to share in the management of the school. Their only object was to secure persons to teach the best information available in the sciences, confident that if the data or political theories were right, science would confirm it, and if it was wrong then it should be discredited as having no value. No Fabian served on the faculty of the school.¹² However, from time to time members lectured on subjects such as socialism, cooperation, Poor Law, economics and economic history. Later the school became part of London University and one of its departmental heads, Harold J. Laski, a Fabian served as an advisor to the President of the United States, Franklin Roosevelt.

In 1906, the Fabians established a summer school. Three or four times a year for periods varying from one week to three months the school was filled with members and friends who used their holidays for the purpose of attending lectures on economics, social, and political subjects and for arranging conferences to discuss special problems connected with the Research Department founded by Mrs. Beatrice Webb.

In order to help working-class students who had the desire to study more continuously than by attendance at lectures, correspondence classes were started in the same class of subjects of lectures given.

¹²George D. H. Cole, The Fabian Society Past and Present Tract No. 258 (London: The Fabian Society, 1942), p. 40.

A textbook was selected and divided into sections, to each of which an introduction was written concluding with questions. Written answers were sent in and corrected by a conductor at the London School of Economics. Through this method as in the previous ways already mentioned the Fabian Society endeavoured to permeate the State with an educational program that would upgrade the educational standard for all its people.¹³

From its formation the Fabian Society said that it was not a political organization, but it encouraged its members to involve themselves in political activity for the cause of advancing Fabian programs. In 1887 they published Tract No. 41 which described the policy of the Fabian Parliamentary League, which existed for a short period. It stated: 'The League will take part in all general and local elections. Until a fitting opportunity arises for putting forward socialist candidates to form the nucleus of a Socialist Party in Parliament, it will confine itself to supporting those candidates who will go farthest in the direction of socialism. It will not ally itself absolutely with any political party; it will jealously avoid being made use of for party purpose; and it will be guided in its action by the character, record and pledges of the candidates before the constituencies. In Municipal School Board, Vestry and other local elections, the League will as it finds itself strong enough run candidates of its own and by placing trustworthy Socialists on local representative bodies it will endeavour to secure the recognition of the Socialist principle in all details of local government.'¹⁴ The League first faded into a political

¹³Pease, op. cit., p. 125.

¹⁴Freemantle, op. cit., p. 194.

committee of the Society and then merged silently and painlessly into the general body.¹⁵

During the years from 1890 to 1892 a series of tracts were published on questions for candidates for Parliament and all the local governing bodies embodying progressive programs of administration with possible reforms in the law, which the candidate was requested to answer by a local elector and which were used with much effect for some years. Much of the progressive policy of London was accomplished by those Fabians who lectured to The Liberal and Radical Working Men's Club of London. Every Sunday for eight months of the year and often on weekdays, political lectures were arranged.

During the election of 1892, Sidney Webb was elected to the London County Council and was able to devote all his time to politics and literary work.¹⁶ Webb was chairman of the Technical Education Board which up to 1904 managed all the educational work in the county other than elementary schools which came under public control. Other Fabians worked in close alliance with members of the London County Council, The Labour Bench, and the trade unionists who formed the Progressive Party under the leadership of John Burns. At first the Fabians tried to permeate their views and their associates through liberal members in the House of Commons. Since most of the members did not put forth the reforms sought by the Fabians, George Bernard Shaw issued a manifesto calling on the working class to form a party of their own. He

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Webb, op. cit., p. 179.

advised them to abandon Liberalism, raise 30,000 pounds, and finance fifty candidates for Parliament. Twelve years after the issue of this manifesto when administrative reform was denied by the Liberal Party, the newly organized Labour Party did precisely what Shaw had demanded. The party ran fifty candidates. Twenty-nine acquired seats in Parliament. Arthur Henderson who was a Labour Socialist Candidate, became the first member of the party to attain cabinet rank when he was made chairman of the Labour Party in the House of Commons.¹⁷

The Fabian Society's policies included also taking advantage of all forms of existing legislation to point out its deficiency in stemming social unrest.

Mr. Herbert Samuels prepared an explanation of the Local Government Act of 1894, commonly called the Parish Council Act. This tract, Parish and District Councils stated that the Society would give advice on any obscure point in the new law passed. Hardly a week passed after its publication that the Society did not receive a letter from some village or small town asking questions as to housing common rights, charities, the duties of chairman of Councils, and the qualifications of candidates. Similar tracts like The Parish and District Councils were published describing the duties of the London County Council, the London Vestries and the Metropolitan Borough Council established in 1899. Sidney Webb published An Intercepted Letter. A copy was sent to all ministers in the House of Commons. He touched on each department of the government. The Letter advocated changes in wages, hours, graduated differential income, tax for the treasury, compulsory

¹⁷ Margaret P. McCarran, Fabianism in the Political Life of Great Britain 1919-1931 (Chicago: Heritage Foundation, 1954), p. 61.

arbitration in labor disputes as well as grant-in-aids for the local governments. Throughout the period from 1894 to 1903 until the Labour Party was founded, the Fabian Society acted as informal information bureau on the laws and practices of the government, particularly local government. It was through these local governments they felt the Society would obtain its goals. Socialist progress towards a democratic state. When the Labour Party was established, Fabians permeated their political views through this organization.

The Boer War of 1899-1902 forced the Fabian Society to consider its policies towards the problems of imperialism. The Boers were a group who had formed the Republic of Transvaal and the Orange Free State in the early nineteenth century. Soon many Europeans who were non-Boers inhabited the Republic seeking gold. Fearful of the persons who came as settlers, the Boers refused them the franchise, taxed them heavily, and subjected them to military service. State aid to English schools was denied. The settlers protested this harsh treatment and involved the aid of Britain.¹⁸ A series of conferences were initiated by Sir Alfred Milner with the leader of the Boers, Paul Kruger. They extended nearly three years and finally revealed that no agreement could be reached. Kruger knew that Britain did not wish to go to war because her South African forces were not strong, therefore, it was possible for the forces of Transvaal to obtain a victory. On October 9, 1899, Transvaal demanded the withdrawal of British troops from the country within forty-eight hours. The British government did not comply and war began. The Orange Free State joined the Transvaal.

¹⁸Smith, op. cit., p. 668.

Together they invaded Natal and Cape Colony.¹⁹

The spectacle of the great British Empire warring with the two tiny republics brought waves of anti-British feeling in Europe. Meanwhile, many Englishmen were not in favor of the war. In one of their Friday meetings in the fall of 1899 the members of the Fabian Society discussed the Boer War and its effects upon the people of the Republics as well as those of Great Britain. The majority of the Fabians agreed that Britain had to win the war and that no other conclusion to it was possible if the Empire was to maintain its status among the countries of the world.

On December 8, 1899, S. G. Hobson moved a long resolution declaring it essential that the attitude of the Society in regard to the war be clearly asserted and concluding. It read as follows: "The Fabians therefore formally dissociates itself from the Imperialism of Capitalism and vainglorious Nationalism and pledges to support the expansion of the Empire only in so far as it may be compatible which the Society was founded to promote."²⁰ Bernard Shaw moved that an amendment declaring that a parliamentary vote was not worth considering that demanded by the Fabians the conclusion of the war. He suggested that measures should be taken by the Society for securing the value of the Transvaal mines for the public, and that the interests of the mines be safeguarded. The amendment was defeated by a 58 to 27 vote and showed the diversity of opinion in the Society on the war.

The Society issued the question, "Are you in favour of official

¹⁹Ibid., p. 669.

²⁰Pease, op. cit., p. 209.

pronouncement being made now by the Fabian Society on Imperialism in Relations to the War?" This was published in The Fabian News and mailed to all members. On one side of the paper were printed four reasons and five on the other side drafted by members of the Executive Committee who favoured each policy. On one hand, it was argued that the Society should resist aggressive capitalism and militarism, thus putting itself into line with international socialism and that expenditure on the war would postpone social reform. On the other hand it was contended that the question was outside the province of the Society, that a resolution by the Society could carry no weight and would not stop the war.²¹ When the votes were tallied 217 favored a pronouncement and 259 were against one. After the poll about fifteen members of the Pro-Boers resigned from the Society. These included J. Ramsey MacDonald and J. Frederick Green a future member of Parliament.

At the beginning of the war the Fabian Executive Committee had resolved to issue a tract on imperialism. George Barnard Shaw undertook the task of making the original draft. The tract published was a manifesto called Fabianism and the Empire. The theme of the manifesto was the overriding claim of efficiency not only in our own government, and in the British Empire but throughout the world. It declared that the earth belongs to mankind and the only valid moral right to national as well as individual possession was that the occupier made adequate use of it for the benefit of the world community. It stated further that the value of a state to the world lies in its civilization not in the magnitude of its armaments and the state which obstructed

²¹Harold J. Laski, Socialism as Internationalism (London: The Fabian Society, 1949), p. 12.

international civilization should go, be it big or little. The moral of the tract was to convey that what the British Empire needed most in its government was not conservatism, not liberalism, not imperialism, but brains and political science.²²

A. Creech Jones, in his article in Fabian Colonial Essays, describes the Society's concern for British colonies. He states that the Fabian socialists deemed it necessary to guarantee to the dependent colonies the institutions, liberty, social and health reforms that would guarantee material prosperity. They believed that no surplus should be accrued in Africa for the production of other wealth if all rewards of the work were at the poverty level and the product was enjoyed overseas, and that the colonies through unionism, adult education and political responsibility in local government moved forward to create their own societies and institutions.²³

The labor question was the area in which Fabianism penetrated its policies most effectively. In An Election Manifesto (Tract No. 40) published in 1892, Shaw bluntly told the working class that until they formed a party of their own they would have to choose between the parties belonging to the other classes. It assured the working class that they could create their own party if they cared as much about politics as they cared for horseracing, and it concludes by advising them to vote for the better or against the worse men on the ground that progress was made step by step. The manifesto was widely circulated

²²Pease, op. cit., pp. 135-136.

²³Rita Hinden, Fabian Colonial Essays (London: George Allen and Unwin Co., 1943), pp. 13-14.

by the vigorous local societies.²⁴

In 1889, only ten per cent of Great Britain's industrial workers belonged to trade unions. The depression in the 1870's and 1880's had resulted in acute suffering among large sections of the working class and resulted in general unrest. As a political step to gain relief for laborers a Labor Representation Committee was formed at Plymouth in 1889. It represented socialist splinter groups and the Fabians in an effort to find means of obtaining parliamentary seats for socialists. The committee was made up of twelve members from trade unions, ten from cooperative societies, and two each from the Fabian Society, the Independent Labour Party, and the Social Democratic Federation. The committee was instructed to invite the cooperation of all working class organizations to a conference to devise ways of increasing the number of Labour members in the next Parliament. To the conference which met in London on February 27, 1900 the three socialist groups: the Independent Labour Party, the Fabian Society, and the Social Democratic Federation sent delegates as did trade unions with membership of 500,000 members.²⁵ Some delegates wanted a pure socialist party based upon recognition as a class war. The conference voted approval of a distinct labor group in Parliament who should have their own whip agree upon their policy which must embrace a readiness to cooperate with any party which for the time being might be engaged in promoting legislation in the direct interest of labor, and be equally

²⁴Pease, op. cit., pp. 112-113.

²⁵J. Ramsey MacDonald, The Socialist Movement (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1911), p. 197.

ready to associate themselves with any party opposing measures having opposite tendency.²⁶ An executive committee was set up and James Ramsey MacDonald, who was later to become the first Labour prime minister, was chosen Secretary. As to the economic principles of the new Labour Representation Conference which it chose to be called rather than a socialist party, the following economic resolutions were adopted:

That this conference declares that in the view of the combinations of capital and the federation of employers, it is necessary for the trade unions of the country to use their political power to defend their existence and secure their demands and while it depreciates the introduction of mere party politics into the trade union movement, it urges upon the trade unionists the necessity of combining on an independent platform for the following purposes: (1) The defense of the legal rights of combination, (2) The passing of such laws as will put an end to a system under which the producer of wealth has to bear an enormous burden in the shape of rents and profits which go to maintain large classes of non-producers.²⁷

Each of the organizations present at the conference was left free to select its own candidate for a seat in Parliament on the one condition that if he were returned to Parliament the candidate would agree to form one of the Labour groups there and act in harmony with its decision. In this way, they would avoid the scandal which in the past had pained earnest men on both sides of seeing trade unionists opposing socialists and vice versa.²⁸

The constitution of the Labour Representation Committee was largely the work of two Fabians, Shaw and MacDonald. It was a revised

²⁶Taft, op. cit., p. 212.

²⁷Beer, op. cit., p. 329.

²⁸Ibid., p. 328.

constitution of the Fabian's New Castle Programme which had adopted by the National Liberal Federation in 1891. It reads as follows:

I

The Labour Representation Committee is a federation of trade unions, trade councils, the Independent Labour Party and the Fabian Society. Co-operative societies are also eligible for membership

II Object

To secure by united action, the election to Parliament of candidate promoted in the first instance, by an affiliated society or societies in the constituency who undertake to form or join a distinct group in Parliament with its own Whips and its own policy on Labour questions, to abstain strictly from identifying themselves with or promoting the interests of any section of the Liberal or Conservative parties and not to oppose any other candidate recognized by this Committee. All such candidates shall pledge themselves to accept this constitution, to abide by the decisions of the group in carrying out the aims of this constitution or resign and to appear before their constituencies under the title of Labour candidates only.

III The Executive

The Executive shall consist of thirteen members, nine representing the trade unions, one of the trade councils, one of the Fabian Society and two of the Independent Labour Party.

The Fabians' interest in labor did not begin with its participation in the Labour Representation Committee. Its members were instrumental in the formation of the Independent Labour Party at Bradford in 1883.²⁹ Twelve Fabians were present at the meeting and the main task was to find a party to consist in detaching the working classes from Liberalism and showing them that politically organized labor could

²⁹Ibid., p. 338.

not constitute a branch of Liberalism any more than trade unions could join the employer's associations. From the beginning the Independent Labour Party adopted a sympathetic attitude towards the trade unions and never swerved from it. At the second annual conference (1894) it was laid down as the duty of every member of the party to join a trade union, and when the Trade Union Congresses were sitting to hold in the evenings socialist demonstrations and to bring the delegates along with them. The main argument of the Independent Labour Party (I. L. P.) consisted in showing the necessity for the trade unions to transfer their independent economy action to the political field. The speakers of the I. L. P. in their educational work among the trade unionists, hardly ever referred to revolution and class warfare, but started from the ethical, non-conformist and democratic sentiments which appeal to most British working classmen. The old trade unionists were hostile towards the new party.³⁰

In 1894, the I. L. P. took part in three parliamentary by-elections and Kier Hardie was elected to a seat in Parliament. In 1895 all I. L. P. candidates were unsuccessful, but it prepared the ground for the success in the 1906 election at which time twenty-nine members gained seats. The Independent Labour Party's policies were essentially those of the Fabian Society. They advocated collective ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, the eight-hour day; abolition of child labor, public provision for the sick, the aged, widows and orphans; free non-sectarian education and

³⁰S. F. Markham, A History of Socialism (New York: Macmillan Co., 1931), p. 84.

public employment for the unemployed. Its program was socialist. The only divergent political policies of the two organizations was that the Fabians had upheld that building a political organization out of one society was impractical, the I. L. P. adopted the method of permeating the trade unions. The Fabians and I. L. P. also formed a Local Government Bureau to be jointly managed by the I. L. P. and the Society. It was intended for Labour members of local authorities to inform other interested persons. The Bureau published annual reports at first on bills before Parliament, and latterly abstracts on such acts passed by Parliament as were of interest to its members.³¹

With the formation of the Labor Representation Conference, the Independent Labour Party realized that another organization was needed to cement an alliance between the trade unions and political socialism and it became submerged in the British Labour Party formally named in 1906 which consisted of Trade Union Congresses, the Social Democratic Federation and the members of the Fabian Society. This organization believed in state ownership or "nationalization" of national resources, public utilities, key industries and other means of production which would remove the evils born of ruthless private enterprise.³²

Members of the Labour Party predicted that socialism would come by gradual stages in the natural evolution of society. During this slow transition, the wealth and other advantages created by science and

³¹Pease, op. cit., pp. 206-207.

³²Smith, op. cit., p. 678.

industry would be diffused with a resultant social regeneration. Free enterprise would yield to collectivism.³³

According to Margaret Cole, "The British Labour Party was a creation of the Fabian Society. Sidney Webb stated in a speech to the graduates of London University in 1921 that the Labour Party was far from assuming that it contained the locks to solve all problems since man was a creature sometimes slow to change his mode of living. . ."³⁴ However, the Labour Party stood for increased study, for scientific investigation of each problem besetting man, for the deliberate, rapid dissemination among all people the sciences that existed. Most of all the Party stood for democratic co-operation. Webb stated further that he hoped the policy and programme of the Party would undergo a perpetual development as knowledge grew and as new phases of social problems presented themselves.

³³Hamilton, op. cit., p. 237.

³⁴Margaret Cole, Beatrice Webb, p. 114.

CHAPTER IV

THE DECLINE OF FABIANISM

The years from 1884 to 1906 formed the period in which Fabianism reached its peak in permeating its views into the economic, political, and imperialistic life of the British people. After 1907 there was a gradual decline in the acceptance of Fabian policies by many of those it had hoped to convert to its methods of socialism. There were many factors that could have caused the Fabian Society to lose the prominence it had attained as the most influential socialist group, but four stand out more prominently than others. These were the dissension among members of the Society itself, the introduction of guild socialism and syndicalism in Britain, and the dissatisfaction of the trade workers concerning the "go slow" policy of Fabianism. Fabians were also accused of being middle-class snobs who were London-minded, London-obsessed, and of being bureaucratic in their efforts to reach a status of pure democracy.

Dissention among the members began rather early in the formative years of the Fabian Society, although this division was not to cause any great split until after the formation of the British Labor Party in 1906. The Fabians up to this time were divided between those who emphasized individual regeneration and those who felt that their main emphasis should be on social reform rather than individual progress.¹

¹Laidler, op. cit., p. 234.

The latter group sympathized with the work being done by the Social Democratic Federation whose aim was to create a working class movement to carry on the works of Robert Owen, an earlier socialist previously discussed, and Thomas Spence (1750-1814), Spence was an early advocate of the single tax. He had devised a scheme of land tenure by parish in which rent paid to the parish corporation would be the only tax paid by all persons. Although the latter group agreed more with Social Democrats, they could not accept its idea that a revolutionary change affecting the very basis of society could be brought about at once; and secondly its members appeared to ignore what might be called the spiritual side of life. Further the Social Democrats seemingly wanted to render a different social system as possible. Therefore, those Fabians who were inclined towards the socialism preached by the Social Democratic Federation decided to try to infiltrate those views they had in common with the Federation into the Fabian Society rather than disassociate themselves, thereby, causing many unpleasant debates and disagreements on pressing problems at many crucial periods.

Another issue contributing towards dissention among members and causing loss of favor with many adherents towards Fabianism was the religious question. As previously stated, Fabians welcomed all persons regardless of religious status. There, however, were Fabians leaders ranging from polite agnosticism to the frank atheism of Shaw and Laski.² To churchgoers, many Fabians felt that socialist goals must be presented in such a manner so as not to appear in conflict with their religious views. Other members disagreed and eventually the Society had many

²Martin, op. cit., p. 55.

members who were non-conformist ministers of the gospel who deserted their pulpits to pursue careers under the auspices of the Fabian Society.³ Those who adhered to christianity constantly urged the Society to take a firmer view on religious matters.

Later at the beginning of the twentieth century, there were many young men who came into the Fabian Society whose views clashed with the older Fabians. Among them were H. G. Wells, S. G. Hobson, and G. D. H. Cole and J. Ramsey MacDonald. MacDonald demanded at one meeting that Tract No. 70 in which George B. Shaw had talked of Fabians throwing their weight in elections be recalled. MacDonald stated that the Labour Party wanted more political action than its member Olivier's going to Jamaica as Colonial Secretary, or the appointment of Shaw as vestryman for St. Pancras, or the election of Graham Wallas to the London School Board. The MacDonald anti-Shaw spirit persisted until 1931.⁴ Later Wallas quarrelled with Sidney Webb over state aid to Catholic schools. Webb thought the educational bill which placed expenses for denominational schools upon local authorities a harsh measure. Wallas resigned from the Society over the issue.

H. G. Wells later resigned from the party when his suggested changes in the Basis which formed the confession of faith of the Society were not accepted. G. D. H. Cole left the party to head the guild socialist movement in Britain because he considered the Fabian policy in the area of condoning revolutionary action for workers too slow. Later the Research Committee that was founded by Beatrice Webb in 1912

³Ibid., p. 55.

⁴McCarran, op. cit., p. 21.

went to guild socialism.

In 1906 the Fabian Summer School members became dissatisfied with debating sociological questions and endeavoured to bring the Fabian Society into closer touch with the newer currents of the labor movements. Members sought to destroy the prejudices of some of the older Fabians against the so-called proletarianism of socialism.⁵ Gradually some members drifted away and joined other socialist groups more to the right wing. These persons later either became converts to the Marxist theory or the schools of syndicalism and "guild" socialism.

The syndicalist movement which attracted many members of the Fabian Society differed with state socialism and collectivism because it placed emphasis on the economic factor as the primary formative agent of social arrangements and social ethics. They believed that there should be direct action and struggle by the workers as a means of obtaining their emancipation from the wage basis and as a means of obtaining a livelihood. Syndicalists also believed that the control of production should be in the hands of the laborers. Other features of the syndicalists' beliefs were that the trade unions should be the focus of labor power, that economic warfare between labor and capital could not be resolved through peaceful negotiations, and that the capitalists were so materialistic that appealing to them through writings or spiritual ideology was out of the question.⁶

The first group to present the views of syndicalism in Great Britain was the Socialist Labour Party of Scotland whose members once

⁵Beer, op. cit., p. 252.

⁶Cole, Fabian Socialism, p. 252.

belonged to the Social Democratic Federation. These persons organized themselves into an organization called the Industrial Workers of the World in the United States in 1905, and gradually this organization spread to England by way of France. It said its members would be guided by the following principles:

(1) there can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few who make up the employing class have all the good things of life; (2) the working class and employing class have nothing in common; (3) between these two classes a struggle must go on until all toilers come together on the political as well as on the industrial level and workers take means to control that which they produce by their labour.⁷

Within a few months Guild Socialism was introduced in England largely through the efforts of Arthur J. Pentty who published the Restoration of the Guild System in 1906. Guild Socialism was in some aspects comparable to the syndicalism of Georges Sorel, a French philosopher, who urged the workers to strike, strike in order to obtain fairness in production and distribution. Some Fabian members including S. G. Hobson, G. D. H. Cole and A. R. Arage, (who had published The Fabian News), became converts to guild socialism because they believed that the Fabian Society had not fought consistently against the wage system. They were of the opinion that if the working class desired political power it must acquire economic power since those who controlled wealth controlled the political structure. The function of guild socialism was to unite labor into a party that would be so strong that it would gain control of Parliament and stop the evils of capitalism through the passage legislation beneficial to the worker.

⁷Beer, op. cit., p. 256.

Guild socialists held that workers should stop spending money on strikes, and here they departed from syndicalism and directed their interests towards the control of industry. The state, in a guild-organized society, was to act as trustee for the community, leasing the means of production to guilds. The guilds would produce, administer and exchange their products, referring all difficulties and questions to a general committee of the federated guilds elected at an annual congress. The Webbs were unsympathetic to any suggestion for control of industry by producers from whatever source they came; they were bitter towards any action that had a taint of unreason, of violence, mysticism or disorderliness.⁸ Fabians relied upon conventionality, and in giving the English people a socialism within the traditional framework, which meant security while changing from one phase of political and economic growth to another.

In view of the facts that there were those who wanted expediency for the labor unrest, the syndicalists and guild socialists were able to establish themselves firmly for a period of some fifteen years as socialist groups to be reckoned with. Emphasizing that labor had industrial as well as political organization that ought to be used in the scheme of social reconstruction, the leaders of these socialist groups were able to impress large followings of would be Fabians. Syndicalists and guild socialists strove to establish a proletariat movement on a trade union basis instead of on socialist dogmas.⁹ The

⁸Margaret Cole, Beatrice Webb, p. 191.

⁹Werner Sombart, Socialism and the Social Movement (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1968), p. 104.

groups had little faith in the process of accumulation or the development of trade unions. The main purpose of these two groups was to lay stress on all that accentuated the class differences thereby stirring up hatred by the proletariat against existing conditions.

Surprisingly an organization whose ideology was based on Fabianism, the British Labour Party, became somewhat discontented with Fabian policies.. After the Dockers' Strike of 1889, in every industrial town new detached groups were formed, animated by the thoughts of a higher social order, confessing on the whole the socialist faith, and joining themselves to the movement of the day.¹⁰ The socialism embraced by these new groups was no servile church of Marxism, but it was built on the economic criticism of capitalism. The existence of poverty and failures in the working system had prevailed the workers into thinking that some type of revolution was necessary. The Liberal and Conservative parties had submerged the economic thought and interest of labor in their superficial political differences. The newly organized trade union groups were not contented with being instruments for the transformation of capitalism, they wanted more voice in political and economic policies.¹¹

The Boer War further served to accelerate all tendencies and movements as discussed to some extent previously in an earlier chapter.

The fundamental points of view in the Fabian Society at the crucial point of the Boer War are reflected in the two motions by

¹⁰J. Ramsey MacDonald, Socialism Critical and Constructive (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1924), p. 64.

¹¹Ibid.

S. G. Hobson and Bernard Shaw. Hobson's motion read:

That, in view of the character and tendencies of political and economic ideas which have principally conduced to the present South African War;

In view, namely, of their antagonism to industrial Democracy at home and of the prejudice which their extension threatens to a settlement, acceptable to Socialists, of the Transvaal economic situation and of pending commercial problems in other foreign countries and British possessions;

This Society deems it essential to the furtherance of its own special aims that its attitude in regard to the war should be clearly asserted and that its methods of future attack upon capitalist commercialism should be widened in the light of this incident.

That as it was not the franchise quarrel that really made the war, but on the one hand the aim of establishing British supremacy from the Cape to Zambesi, on the other the set purpose of the Republic at all costs to maintain their independence, this Society is not called upon to criticize either the Outlanders' political claims or the Boers' policy in regard thereto.

That the phase of Imperialist passion that has overrun this country of recent years, and is the chief cause of the war, has distracted the attention of the nation from domestic progress, has debased the conscience and lowered the democratic spirit of the English people, has effected a sinister co-operation between professional financiers and the military power; and threatens to involve us in political responsibilities which mean the establishment of militarism as the predominant element in our public life and the paramountcy of the interests that withstand the advance of Socialism.

The Fabian Society therefore formally dissociates itself from the Imperialism of Capitalism and vainglorious Nationalism, and pledges itself to support the expansion of the Empire only in so far as that may be compatible with the expansion of that higher social organization which this Society was founded to promote.¹²

Shaw proposed an amendment to replace Hobson's motion which read as follows:

That in view of the character claimed for the South African War by the Government as a disinterested struggle to secure democratic institutions for the Outlanders of the Transvaal, the Fabian Society ventures to remind the public:

(1) That the time has gone by for regarding the acquisition of a Parliamentary vote alone as worth a war. If it were, about

¹²McBriar, op. cit., p. 121.

a third of the adult male population of these islands, and all the adult women, would be justified in resorting to armed revolution.

(2) That Democratic Institutions in the modern sense imply:

(a) the recognition of public rights in the natural resources of the country, and the effective safeguarding of these rights against speculators to whom concessions may be granted for commercial purposes;

(b) the protection of the wageworkers by legislation making due precautions for their health and safety compulsory.

(3) That the country is therefore entitled to expect that in the event of this war being carried to a successful issue, the Government will take steps to;

(a) secure public rights in the valuable mines of the Rand by either placing them in public hands or else exacting in royalties the full economics rent to be expended on public works for the development of the country, after recoupment of a reasonable share of the expenses of the war;

(b) insist on a stringent Mines Regulation Act for the protection of miners.

(4) That failing the above Imperial precautions, the only effect of victory will be to deprive the Transvaal of its present institutions under the Boer Republic, and make it a prey of the commercial speculators of all nations and races whose avowed object is to make private fortunes out of the mines without regard to the public welfare. Such a result would expose the British Government to the charge of being the dupes of these speculators, and of having spent the nation's blood and treasure, and outraged humanity by a cruel war, to serve the most sordid interests under the cloak of a lofty and public-spirited Imperialism.

(5) And finally, since the spokesmen and newspapers of both our political parties, without a single exception, declared before the war that the constitutional grievances of the Outlanders must be remedied in any case, every member of these parties, whether he approves of the war or believes that it might have been avoided by more skillful diplomacy, is bound to insist that the advance in liberty and good government for which we are professedly fighting shall not be lost sight of in the hubbub of party recrimination, theatrical patriotism and financial agitation.

The Fabian Society pledges itself to do its utmost to recall public opinion to the realities of the situation as set forth above, and to press them on both political parties as matters which demand and admit of complete unanimity among disinterested and politically conscientious Englishmen.¹³

¹³Ibid., p. 122.

At the monthly meeting of the Fabian members, neither the resolution proposed by Hobson nor the amendment of Shaw was carried. Nonetheless, the Fabians were, on the whole, honestly thinking in terms of "right," because they recommended a policy of recognizing the growth of modern Empire, though they did not subscribe to any monistic economic interpretations. Fabians would not admit to being Imperialists. Nevertheless, they were quick to say they were not Jingoists whose visions were clouded by hysterical patriotism.

This general approach to the war question by the Fabians proved unsatisfactory to the thousands of workers who felt that they were not being compensated for their services in supplying manpower and needed materials to fight the war. They believed that they had nothing to gain by peaceful collaborations, but must use whatever means of persuasion necessary to protect their interests. They disagreed with the Manchester School of Economics which taught that the less interference there was between the operations of free enterprise, the greater the prosperity of capitalists and workers alike. They wanted administrative reorganization and social regeneration for all skilled and unskilled labor. To the worker, political power without economic power was a mockery, and they were unwilling to merely wait until slow reform made England's government that of State Socialism. Therefore, many workers demanded direct action through which they could gain control of industry and not the State socialism of Fabianism which worked for nationalization of the earth's products such as gas, water and electricity. It appeared to many persons that the State and nationalization were only historic phases of deeper principles and forces. That the advantages were no more balanced than the disadvantages. Thereby,

orators on both sides of the question of State nationalization tried to point out how the complex problem of industry could be handled.

In all spheres of life in the first decade of the twentieth century, the watchword was "freedom, the removal of restraint, positive measures of reconstruction."¹⁴ It was generally felt that the competitive system of wage labor was not suitable for the social development of Great Britain. The competitive system that prevailed at the turn of the century only caused widespread misery, commercial and industrial crises, depression, anarchy and starvation.

With the rising cost of living, taxation and social reform legislation filling the minds of Britain, it is easy to understand why the masses of workers would become discontented and organize themselves more completely than ever before or why they used strikes as a means of gaining compensations rather than trying to negotiate through the Liberal or Conservative Parties.¹⁵

Since Fabianism was just one of the several socialist groups and its appeal was more to the intellects, its program was confined to minimum programs, through its members in the Labour Party. Socialism to be successful has to take sides, be above conflicts, while at the same time move men by education towards moral idealism. The decline of Fabianism was based mostly on the premise that it did not want to cause a clash between capital and labor and involve itself more in the political issues of the era, and therefore its members were reluctant

¹⁴Thomas Kirkup, A History of Socialism (London: Adams and Charles Black, 1900), p. 321.

¹⁵Helen and Scott Nearing, Socialists Around the World (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1958), p. 31.

to take positive stands when they should have if they expected their type of socialism to succeed where other socialist movements had failed.

CONCLUSION

Through socialistic organizations, men in the last of the nineteenth century tried to substitute legislation that would benefit all members of society rather than any class or group. These socialists believed that the capitalistic system which held the power of ownership over production was wrong since it held power over the mental and physical action of the majority in economic, political and social welfare.

Socialists thinkers believed that if the needs of the community were to be met democratically, the organization of society had to be based on man as the producer of a particular commodity; on man as a consumer of a whole range of commodities, and on man as a citizen concerned with national defense and order.¹

Socialism to most nineteenth-century socialists meant an equal chance for all and democratic freedom through communal or public ownership.

Socialism up to 1890 was generally regarded as insurrectionary, utopian, and almost incomprehensible. Fabianism, which drew its socialism from several sources, repudiated that assumption that any socialistic movement was necessarily bound up with insurrection or

¹George D. H. Cole, Fabian Socialism, p. 13.

utopianism. Fabianism was an intellectual movement to provide a parliamentary program for Great Britain which would remedy the existing evils of society.

According to Sidney Webb, the Fabians preached continuously the doctrine of socialism as a matter of abstract economic and political theory and set for themselves the purpose of detaching from the term socialism the extraneous ideas of sudden and simultaneous change, violence, compulsion and atheism.

The Fabian Essays presented the case for socialism in a language which everybody could understand. Later in The Fabian Tracts, Fabians attempted to build socialism on the foundations of the existing political and social institutions and prove that socialism was but the next step in the development of society.

The policy of Fabianism from the beginning was to permeate all classes from top to bottom with a common opinion in favour of social control of socially created values. To obtain this the Fabians worked through liberal capitalists as well as Labour representatives. The Society urged the necessity of gradual amelioration of social conditions by a gradual assertion of social control over unearned incomes.² Further the Society preached that any society which was to exert control had to have a political constitution that was thoroughly democratic and all industries socialized so as to guarantee a livelihood independent of private capitalism.

The Fabians through means of specialized research into the

²Martin, op. cit., p. 57

various manifestations of the economic and social life of Great Britain were able to acquaint themselves with the machinery of legislation and administration and to put their knowledge and experience at the disposal of all political agencies.

Fabian teachings influenced the promoting of administrative protection for laborers. It did not exterminate the earlier types of socialism because there are still those preaching revolutionary forms as a means for gaining rights, but the socialism as expanded by the Fabians has made many people conscious of the fact that socialism does not necessarily mean destruction or insurrection.

Fabians saw in the middle class a group that could be utilized in the development of techniques that would better the governmental administrations of certain agencies. The Society believed that by arousing the public to the evils of the existing order, the conscience of society would be in favour of socialistic ideals.

Fabianism, however, was not able to realize the goals it so desired in a marked degree. There are several factors which probably contributed to its gradual decline as the most profound socialistic school of thought. Among these were the inability of some of its members to take a definite stand on some of the important issues of post-war period, the acceptance of many members whose ideas many of the older members considered too revolutionary, the inability of the Society to reach more than a few thousand of the British population through teaching and writing; the rivalry of other socialist organizations in Britain, among them the Marxist socialists who had a large following among the dissatisfied workers; the introduction of guild

socialism and syndicalism in the first decade of the nineteenth century attracted many Fabian members who had become discontented with the methods used by the organization. These former Fabians became members of the newer social orders and helped to further their causes among the working classes.

However one might view the strengths or weaknesses of the Fabian Society, this organization which started as a discussion club has become perhaps the most important and long-lived socialist organization in England. Through its members in the London School of Economics, Fabian teachings are being taught yearly to hundreds of aspirants of a better social order. Fabianism has become the dominant influence in the Socialist International according to Rose Martin in Fabian Freeway.

The Fabian Society which was able through its techniques to permeate the established institutions and political parties has succeeded to have many of the democratic processes they so desired come into being through the work of its members in the British Labour Party which today holds the majority vote in the House of Commons; although, as an organized socialist group it failed to accomplish many of those ideals it deemed necessary for a true socialist state.

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